Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

THOMAS MAWSON OF LANCASTER

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He was a Lancaster man – born near Scorton in 1861; educated first in Lancaster and then Ingleton; with his main business office on High Street, Lancaster; and dying in his home in Hest Bank in 1933.

Yet the Lake District can also lay claim to him because the family nursery business and an office were in Windermere and around there originated so many of his major commissions. He was also a global figure who operated in the USA, Canada and across Europe.

How to describe his work? In rough order he was a gardener, nurseryman, garden designer, architect, author, town planner, landscape architect and social visionary. If asked, he might have chosen 'landscape architect', of which Institute he was the founding President.





Brockhole (1900), Windermere, for William Gaddum, Manchester silk manufacturer (www.visitcumbria.com)

His formal education was limited – he left school at 12. Later courses in sketching, botany and horticulture were important. Yet, to become a landscape architect he needed to deploy a wide range of skills in building, art, planting, business and, above all, the psychology of the late Victorian and Edwardian wealthy who were his clients.

He opened a small office in London, as had Gillow centuries earlier, to attract southern commissions. Among his clients were the seriously rich (Andrew Carnegie, Lord Leverhulme, Lord Cavendish, HH The Maharajah of Baroda) and the merely rich – the baronets, colonels and new industrialists whose tastes and aspirations were the real backbone of his business.

He is perhaps best known for his garden designs. He trod a middle path between the formalists and naturalists of that late-nineteenth-century era, refining his own hybrid style. His designs had formal elements – terraces, sweeping steps, geometric ponds, walls, paving and pergolas. They also had naturalistic elements, linking the garden to the landscape beyond it, using circular pathways and woodland walks.

He favoured native trees. Nevertheless among his favourite plants, at least in northern gardens with acidic soils, were acers, rhododendrons and azaleas. In herbaceous borders he often used peony, verbascum, phlox, penstemon, aquilegia and iris. Clematis and rose scrambled up his pergolas. He also had to think of his clients' needs – somewhere for the tennis court, greenhouses and the kitchen garden, and the need for views both ways, from the house and terracing across to the landscape and from distant viewpoints back to the impressive house at the heart of the garden.

'Mawson' usually refers to Thomas Hayton Mawson (1861–1933) but we need to remember his family. His father was very influential in Thomas's early career and his brothers as nurserymen and builders were complementary to Thomas's practice. His son and grandson developed the family business until it closed in 1978, 45 years after Thomas's death. So, 'a Mawson garden' may have been designed by Thomas alone or by his son or by staff in his firm, and family members may have been sub-contractors in its creation.



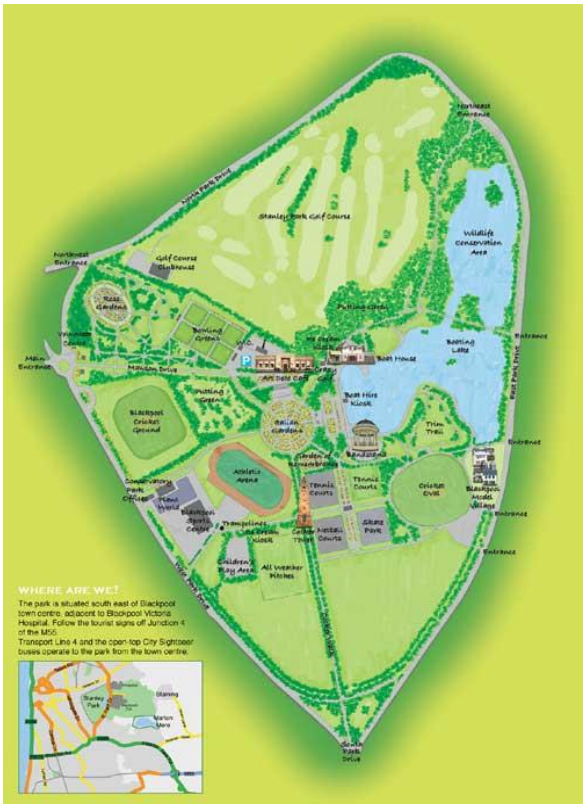
Rydal Hall Gardens (1909), Ambleside, for Stanley le Fleming whose family had owned the site since 1409. (www.rydalhall.org)

Later in his career he moved into wider civic design of public parks and eventually what we would now call town planning. This work took him to The Hague, Athens, Thessaloniki, Vancouver, Calgary and Saskatoon.

This wider civic design is well illustrated in Westfield War Memorial Village in Lancaster, for which there is a companion leaflet in this series (Guide 19). Mawson, one of whose sons was killed in the First World War, conceived the idea of 'villages' for disabled ex-servicemen who could not return to their families. This was as much about creating a caring community as it was about building them houses (some designed by Mawson), social facilities and opportunities for training and employment. The idea did not catch on nationally, integration within the wider community being favoured and perhaps cheaper.

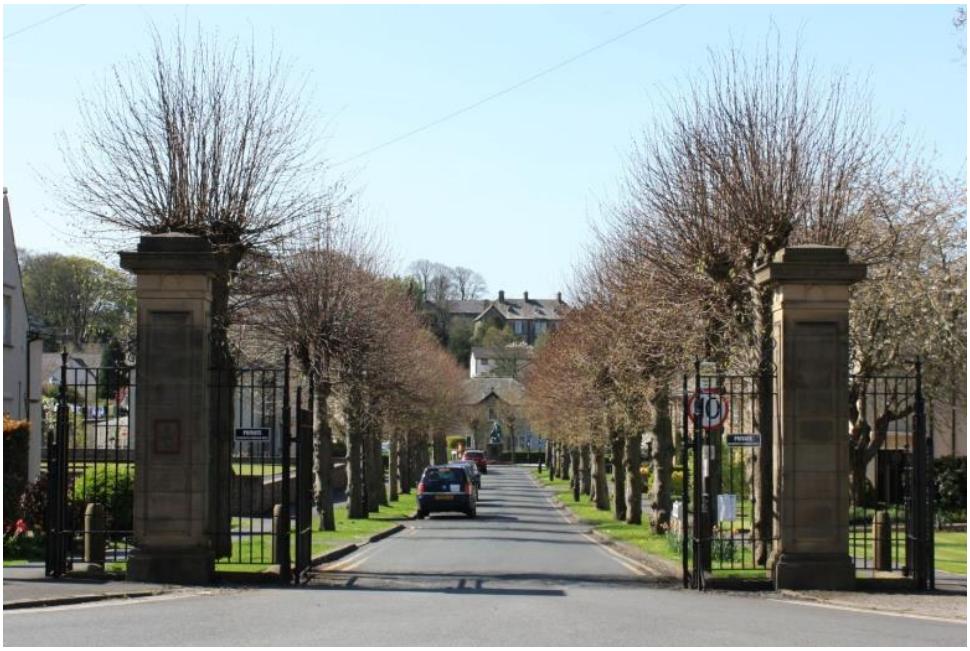
Around Lancaster, notable Mawson gardens (mostly in private hands) can be seen at Grey Walls and Hazelwood (Silverdale) and Capernwray Hall. Among his many garden commissions in the Lake District are Brockhole, Graythwaite Hall, Langdale Chase, Moor Crag and Rydal Hall. Among his public parks are Barrow, Stanley Park (Blackpool), Lord Street and the Marine Lake area (Southport) and Lever Park and Rivington Park (Bolton).





Stanley Park (1922), Blackpool (www.friendsofstanleypark.org.uk)

Mawson published two important books on his field, *The Art and Craft of Garden Making* (1900) and *Civic Art* (1911): both are still available. Archival material on Mawson is held by Cumbria Archive Service in Kendal.





Westfield War Memorial Village (1926), Lancaster – entrance and bowling green (Gordon Clark)

Reading

To discover more about Mawson we suggest:
Jane Waymark *Thomas Mawson: Life, Gardens and Landscapes*. London: Francis Lincoln (2009).
The definitive work.
Also and less expensive:
Elizabeth Kissack *The life of Thomas Hayton Mawson: Landscape Architect 1861–1933*.
Published by the author (2006).
Both books are very well illustrated.

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